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SIPDIS

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SENSITIVE

ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU - AMB COURVILLE  
DEPT FOR AF/E, AF/FO, INR/AA, AND DRL  
DEPT FOR DS/IP/AF/E - CKOLLMAR  
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SUBJECT: ANJOUAN'S BACAR MOVES TO DERAIL COMOROS VOTE

REF: ANTANANARIVO 477 AND PREVIOUS

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. Violence broke out again on the Comoran island of Anjouan June 5 as island strongman Mohamed Bacar continued his pattern of extralegal efforts to cling to power. Bacar, who stepped aside as island president to run for reelection (Reftels), appears to have no intention of losing the election and no compunction about derailing the process if it appears that he might lose. June 5 his loyal militia fired shots to disperse a crowd at the airport, thereby preventing the arrival of Union President Ahmed Abdallah Sambi; the airport remained closed as of June 6. Elections on the three islands are scheduled for June 10, but the Anjouan elections may be postponed if the security situation makes it impossible to hold them. The Union Government and local human rights groups have both urged a robust presence by the African Union (AU) and the international community as the only way to prevent Bacar from stealing the election. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) Forces loyal to deposed Anjouan "president" Bacar fired shots June 5 to disperse a crowd at the airport in Anjouan and unconfirmed reports indicate up to three people were injured. Expecting Union President Sambi's plane to arrive, a large crowd of Sambi supporters had gathered at the airport to welcome him; according to one report they were also trying to remove debris from the air strip placed by Bacar supporters seeking to prevent the plane from landing. A contingent of 80 South African police officers, under the auspices of the AU, has arrived in Anjouan. They are reportedly sticking close to their hotel, unable or unwilling to challenge Bacar loyalists. With a militia of 200 well-armed gendarme forces, Bacar controls the airport and major cities in Anjouan.

13. (SBU) Earlier reports that President Sambi's plane was "fired upon" June 5 were apparently false - the pilot returned to Moroni when he heard the shots fired on the ground. As of midday June 6, Union Gendarmes contacts in Moroni report that Sambi supporters are trying to barricade roads in Anjouan to limit movements of Bacar's militia. President Sambi has not yet decided when he will again attempt to travel to Anjouan; he awaits the arrival of African Union Envoy Francisco Madeira, who is expected June 6. The airport reportedly remains closed and under the control of Bacar's militia.

Union Government and NGOs Request Help  
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14. (SBU) In repeated public statements, the Union Government has said they want free and fair elections. Privately GOC officials have told us they will postpone the island president election in Anjouan (planned for June 10) if adequate AU forces cannot deploy there to guarantee security. To date candidates to succeed Bacar in Anjouan (Reftels) allege they have not had adequate security to campaign freely. Contacts in Anjouan indicate Bacar loyalists are intimidating the other candidates, including tearing down their banners and breaking up meetings. Bacar also controls the only functioning radio station in Anjouan.

15. (SBU) Ahmed Mohamed Allaoui, President of the Comoran Human Rights Federation (FCDH), has also launched another appeal to the international community to "crush the rebellion" in Anjouan (referring to Bacar). Allaoui wants the island election postponed to June 24 and asks the international community to support the Union Government in "liberating" Anjouan to restore constitutional law.

Elections Administration  
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16. (SBU) Elections for island president (governor) for each of the Union of the Comoros' three islands -- Grand Comore, Anjouan, and Moheli - are slated to be held June 10. With multiple candidates on all three islands, run-off elections between the top two vote-getters are planned for June 24 if no candidate emerges with a majority. Contacts with the National Electoral Commission (CENI) report lack of funding has prevented payment of organizers, who threaten to strike June 7. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) is financing elections materials and some of the administration; it is also trying to resolve the issue of salaries so the election administration continues. Our UNDP colleagues report all elections materials have arrived to date and, with significant exceptions in Anjouan, the Constitutional Court has

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received few reports of irregularities. Given AU logistical support, managing the 300 polling stations should be feasible on Grande Comore and Moheli. On Anjouan, Bacar has been willing to confront the Union government but has so far backed down each time he has been confronted by the international community.

Action by Embassy Antananarivo  
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17. (SBU) Embassy Antananarivo has issued an op-ed to Comoran press outlets supporting free, fair and transparent elections in the Comoros. The Embassy intends to send three American and one local staff to observe the June 10 island elections. Two of these Americans are slated to observe the Anjouan elections; their presence will contribute to international efforts to restrain Bacar within democratic norms. However, should the security situation deteriorate further, their travel to Anjouan will be deferred. No other American citizens are believed to be present on Anjouan.

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